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ABSTRACT

This study sought to determine whether Chicago Public School teachers are more involved in shared decision making since the Chicago School Reform 1988. A review of literature on shared decision making yielded inconclusive results. While some studies concluded that shared decision making is imperative, other studies suggested that school climate, principal leadership, and staff development played a more important role in school improvement and student achievement. The Thomas Shared Decision Making Questionnaire was distributed to various teachers in Phi Delta Kappa, a national sorority to which Chicago teachers belong. The population sample included 30 teachers from a number of Chicago public schools who had taught before the 1988 reform. Among the findings were: (1) only 53 percent of the teachers believed that they were more involved in shared decision making since the 1988 school reform; (2) 70 percent stated that a collaborative relationship existed between principal and teachers, but that teachers generally yielded to the principal's opinion; (3) teachers did not believe that students were improving or that there was more parent participation; (4) 60 percent of the respondents participated in shared decision making; and (5) 73 percent believed that shared decision making by teachers has led to innovations or new activities at their schools. A copy of the study instrument with teacher responses is included. (Contains 23 references.) (JB)

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By: Barbara J. Thomas

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TEACHERS' OPINION OF SHARED DECISION MAKING SINCE CHICAGO SCHOOL REFORM 1988

Barbara J. Thomas

Chicago School Reform of 1988 was enacted by the Illinois legislature to address the high dropout rate, low-achieving students, a nonresponsive bureaucracy, and many related urban school problems. As a result of Chicago School Reform Act, a number of powers have shifted from central administration or board level to the local school. Teachers are not only asked to be responsible for the classroom, but are now being asked to assist in critical decisions about curriculum, textbook selection and how to use State Chapter One funds.

Since teachers play an important role in the educational process of our children, then it is imperative that we monitor teachers perceptions and participation in the reform process. Gathering information for planning and monitoring shared decisions by teachers can enhance shared decisions in the schools. Some have taken the approach that plans can be designed by collecting data on what is already occurring or not occurring in the schools (Russell 1922). Others have focused on surveying teachers about practices they would prefer (Smylie 1992).

Although a number of studies have investigated the role of the teacher in the decision making process, the findings have been inconclusive. Many researchers believe that teachers must play an important role in the decision making process if schools are going to improve. While others believe that school climate, principal leadership, staff development plays a greater role in school improvement.

Consequently, additional research will improve decision making quality and the Reform Act as well. It is hoped the findings will provide insight into whether teachers are participating in the decision making process and whether they believe their schools have improved since Chicago School Reform. Additional research concerning shared decision making by teachers can also ensure that reform efforts can have an impact on student outcomes, and that it will create a more positive learning climate through out the school. The results of the study will be of value to educators, administrators, teachers, parents, legislators, and the community.

In December 1988 the Illinois State legislature passed the Chicago School Reform Act, which sought to replace traditional bureaucratic control of the schools with a complex system of decision making by local schools. The act promotes three distinct sites of power in school committees:

(1) parent-dominated local school councils (LSCs);
(2) increased principal responsibility and accountability;
(3) increased teacher participation in decision making (Bryk and Rollow 1992).

The Chicago School Reform Act is also called site-based management. Site-based management is neither a new idea nor a single process. Rather, site-based management is one of many new terms used to describe an educational philosophy that has existed for decades: that local control of the schools improves educational quality.

Site-based management created an avenue for the input of teachers, support staff, parents and the community; people with firsthand knowledge of the issues. Since educators at the school level were most familiar with the unique abilities and needs of their student, they can provide and design better services and programs for students than a removed central office staff. Proponents of site-based management also pointed that participation in decision making instilled a sense of ownership involved in the school, and improved teachers' morale and motivation by formally recognizing the merit of their professional opinions. Finally, advocates contended that improvement plans would be locally developed and specific with clear lines of responsibility established for the program elements (Evans and Oberman 1990).

Shared decision making is becoming a part of many American schools. Shared decision making is based on a premise that relies on four main assumptions:

(1) those closest to the children will make the best decision concerning the children's education;
(2) teachers, parents, and school staff should have influence in policies;
(3) those who implement the decision should have a voice in the decisions; and
(4) if those implementing the decision feel a sense of ownership of the decision, they are more likely to implement the decision effectively.

The idea of shared decision making is not to replace the principal as a school leader, but rather incorporate the principal into a decision-making team. The purpose of shared decision making is to improve school effectiveness, improve student learning, to increase staff commitment, and ensure schools are responsive to student needs (Liontos 1994).

The Consortium on Chicago School Research conducted an in-depth case study in more than 25 school communities and on systemwide analyses of indicators based on administrative records and on original surveys gathered from more that 400 principals and 12,000 teachers. The approximately 500 elementary schools within the Chicago system produce a diverse and varied story. In many school communities parents, community leaders, teachers

and principals have joined together to use the resources and the opportunities offered by school reform to institute broad and deep changes that aim to revitalize their schools and make then central to their communities. In some other places progress has been slower and more uneven. In still others, there is little sense that schools are moving forward (Bryk, Easton, Kerbow, Rollow and Sebring 1994). This was mostly due to lack of shared decision making by all parties involved in school improvement.

Research on shared decision making has been discouraging. When curriculum changes required shared decision making, most districts have great difficulty in sharing the power. These disappointments often stem from inadequate staff development and failure to develop shared understanding or to organize the faculty for extended cohesive action (Fullan 1990).

Rosenholtz (1989) may have been the first researcher to attempt a large-scale statistical analysis of the relationship between teacher collaboration and shared decision making and student achievement. Quantitative data gathered from her statewide representative sample of 78 elementary schools in eight school districts show that collaboration and shared decision making is a strong predictor of student achievement gains in reading and math. The gains were measured with one cohort of students from second through fourth grades. A regression analysis controlled for school socioeconomic status, school size, teacher experience, teachers' verbal ability, and pupil-teacher ratio.

Several case studies and the results of effective school research also suggested a correspondence between collaborative norms and improved teaching and learning. When teachers share in decisions concerning curriculum, materials and staff development, they become more effective in their classrooms.

Little (1982) conducted case studies of four schools identified as successful on the basis of student achievement on standardized achievement scores and two schools identified as unsuccessful on the basis of the same criteria. She found that the successful schools were characterized by frequent teacher evaluations and feedback on them, teachers talking with one another about teaching, teachers working together to design their classes, and teachers teaching each other.

From their review of research on effective schools, Purkey and Smith (1983) identified four process variables that "define the general concept of school culture and climate": collaborative planning and collegial relationships, sense of community, clear goals and high expectations commonly shared, and order and discipline. Concerning the first of these variables, they say:

> Collegiality serves many purposes. Chief among them are that it breaks down barriers between department and among teachers/administrators, encourages the kind of intellectual sharing that can lead to consensus, and promotes feelings of unity and commonality among the staff.

Teacher empowerment has become a focus of educational reform, leadership models, and teaching effectiveness. Short and Johnson (1994) conducted a study which related to leadership

power and the amount of conflict with teachers' perceptions of their level of empowerment. The influence of age, race, and principal gender on teacher empowerment was also analyzed. Conclusions from the study suggest that the relationship of teacher satisfaction with the principal to the principal's use of referent power. This suggests that teachers' who perceive themselves as participants in the school decision making process give the principal power because of the teachers' personal belief in good will of the principal; thus, principals who would replace legitimate power with referent power also likely would invest more decision making opportunities in the faculty. Obviously, trust is an issue here.

A 1980 study was conducted on Wisconsin junior high and middle school teachers that investigated the extent of teacher involvement in school wide and instructional issues, teachers' interest and expertise in decision issues, and teachers' job satisfaction. After a decade of explicit attention to enhanced teacher professionalism and empowerment, teachers still desire more involvement than they are afforded (Rice and Schneider 1994).

The meanings and roles of democracy and education, and the interaction of the two, are some of the most difficult questions society faces. The definition of democracy varies widely from a political mechanism to an ideal. Past efforts to infuse democracy into the schools have generally been of two types. One is requiring a greater role for teachers in school decision making. The other is greater community involvement or control in education. Research has shown that neither form of school democracy has resulted in much improvement in education or student learning. Levin (1994) suggested that an alternative to these approaches is that schools must embody democracy and make it a part of education. Democracy must be taught as a characteristic of society, not the individual. Also, it should be more than a political mechanism; at its best it is a way of life.

The National Education Longitudinal Study 1988 examined the relationship of teacher decisional participation and school climate to teacher' sense of efficacy and their job satisfaction. Data was collected from 1,035 schools with eighth grade students, and from the 1990 follow up of 1,296 schools. The final data set involved 9,987 teachers and 27,994 rating of students. Results indicate that school climate has a noteworthy association with job satisfaction. However, the climate and sense of efficacy is limited. Climate was found to be composed of three elements: principal leadership, faculty collegiality, and student discipline. Each of these climate components had a relatively strong association with teachers' feelings of job satisfaction. Participation in decision making did not explain as much of the variance in job satisfaction as the climate variables, and accounted for very little of the variance in teachers' sense of efficacy. Results tentatively suggest that satisfaction mediates the relationship between perceptions of school climate and a sense of efficacy (Taylor and Tashakkori 1994).

Peterson (1994) suggested that school-based management

as it relates to teacher decision making can be ineffective, even harmful when lacking sufficient support, expertise, and time to succeed. One can not assume that changing the decision-making composition will automatically improve the quality of decisions being made. Stakeholder satisfaction does not guarantee quality results.

In a recent study, Ogletree and McHenry (1989) surveyed 100 Chicago teachers in 10 schools. The responses indicated that no gains have been made in student achievement, school climate, teacher involvement in decision making, or job satisfaction. Most teachers believed that small classes, reduced paperwork, more instructional materials, more security, and higher teacher salaries would improve student achievement and working conditions. Teachers were not optimistic about the Local School Councils (each composed of six parents, two community representatives, two teacher representatives, and one principal) created to decentralize school administration.

Also in, "Teachers Opinions of Chicago School Reform and Teacher Involvement", Ogletree and McHenry (1989) concluded that teacher involvement is crucial for the successful implementation of school-based management reform. Evaluation of the Chicago school reform effort is the purpose of this report. The survey of 100 Chicago teachers in 10 schools suggested that teachers do not consider themselves to be an integral part of the school restructuring process. Findings also indicate that unless school restructuring efforts actively involve teachers in decision making, the quality of education, student retention and graduation rates, teacher autonomy will not be improve.

Literature of shared decision making is inconclusive. Some studies concluded that shared decision making is imperative as it relates to school improvement and accountability. However, other studies suggested that school climate, principal leadership, and staff development played a more important role in school improvement and student achievement. Since, Chicago reform includes teachers in the decision making process it is very important that we monitor their progress. Therefore, the purpose of the study is to determined if Chicago Public School teachers are more involved in shared decision making since Chicago School Reform 1988.

Procedures

The population/sample in this study included 30 teachers from a number of Chicago public schools who have taught before Chicago School Reform 1988.

The TSDMQ was distributed to various teachers in the National Sorority of Phi Delta Kappa, a Chicago teachers sorority. It was distributed at their annual Teach-A-Rama which is held in November at IIT.

The findings were tabulated in terms of percentages. The Chi Square was used to determine the statistical significance (.05) of the responses.

Findings of the Study

The data in table 1 shows that only fifty-three percent of the teachers believed that they are more involved in shared decision making since Chicago School Reform 1988. Therefore, the results support the null hypothesis and does not support the research hypothesis that teachers believe that they are more involved in shared decision making since Chicago School Reform 1988. The results coincide with the findings of Ogletree and McHenry (1989).

In the first category of the questionaire that dealt with opinions of shared decision making, seventhy-percent of the teachers stated that there existed a collaborative relationship between principals and teachers in shared decision making. However, teachers significantly concluded that most teachers yield to the opinion of the principal. Teacher decision making may be ineffective, if lacking support, expertise, and time to succeed (Peterson 1994). Many teachers believed that principals do encourage teachers participation in shared decision making. Yet, forty-three percent did not have a systematic manner with opportunities for decision making.

In the category concerning school improvement and shared decision making, teachers do not believe that students are improving in reading, math or that student attendance has improved. Fifty percent of the teachers also stated that parents are no more involved in their child's education. Levin (1994) suggested that one can not assume that changing the decision making process will automatically improve the the quality of schools.

In the third category concerning shared decision making through the P.P.A.C., sixty percent of the teachers participated in shared decision making through the P.P.A.C.. Also they agreed that they met regularly to address curriculum issues. Yet, most of the P.P.A.C. meetings are convened at the request of teachers not the Local School Council or principal. Teachers also agreed that they do meet to address issues concerning school improvement as it relates to student achievement. They also agreed that they are knowledgeable about the P.P.A.C.'s realm of operation.

In the final category concerning innovations as a result of shared decision making, seventy-three of the teachers believed that shared decision making by teachers has lead to a new innovations or activities at their schools. Teachers also agreed that they are more involved in textbook selection and introducing new programs in their schools. They also agreed that they seek involvement in decision making aimed at improving the quality and level of innovation in their schools. The findings indicate that when teachers share in decision concerning curriculum, materials and staff development, they become more effective in the classroom.

Table 1

Thomas Shared Decision Making Questionnaire

Question		Teacher Responses(%) (N=30)		
		Yes	No	Don't Know
1.	Do you believe that teachers are more involved in decision making since Chicago School Reform 1988?	53	47	
2.	In your school, are topics addressed in a systematic manner with opportunities for decision making?	47	43	10
3.	Does a collaborative relationship between principal and teachers in the decision making process exist.	70*	27	3
4.	Do you believe that most teachers yield to the opinion of the principal?	80*	17	3
5.	Do you believe that the principal encourages teachers' participation in shared decision making?	57*	30	13
6.	Do you believe that shared decision making leads to school improvement?	83*	14	3
7.	Since Chicago School Reform 1988, are students improving in reading?	14	63*	23
8.	Since Chicago School Reform 1988, are students improving in math?	23	60*	17
9.	Since Chicago School Reform 1988, has attendance improved?	27	50*	23
10.	Are parents more involved in their child's education since reform?	40	50*	10
11.	Do teachers participate in shared decision making through the P.P.A.C.?	60*	30	10
12.	Does the P.P.A.C. meet regularly to address curriculum issues?	50	33	17
13.	Are meetings of the P.P.A.C. generally convened at the request of teachers?	53	40	7
14.	Does the P.P.A.C. meet to address issues of school improvement as it relates to student achievement.	63*	20	17
15.	Are members of the P.P.A.C. knowledgeable about its' realm of operation?	57*	23	20
16.	Do you believe that teacher decision making has lead to a new innovation?	57*	27	16
17.	Are teachers involved in introducing new programs to the school?	60*	17	1
18.	Are teachers involved in textbook selection?	83*	13	4
19.	Does the principal seek input on decisions related to instruction?	73*	20	7
20.	Do teachers seek involvement in decision making aimed at improving the quality and level of innovation of the school?	73*	20	7

*Statistically significant at the .05 level of confidence.

In the response to the open ended question at the end of the questionnaire, many teachers made comments that further indicated their desire to share in the decision making process in their schools. The following are those comments:

1. When we are allowed to make decisions concerning curriculum, we become stakeholders in that decision.
2. If teachers become more involved, students' academic achievement will improve.
3. We have meetings, people talk about what should be done... generally, it's lip service. We are still bound by Board of Education rules and guide lines. Change is limited.
4. We need more money so that the decision we do make can be implemented.
5. New teachers have not been inserviced so that they can participate fully in the decision making process. Due to early retirement, many teachers don't know what decision making is.
6. Fortunately we have a very democratic, 21st century principal. Many decisions are shared and we are all growing as a team from this. However the decision making process is slow to implement.

Overall, the data lead to the acceptance of the null hypothesis: teachers are no more involved in shared decision making since Chicago School Reform 1988. However, teacher involvement is crucial for the successful implementation of school-based management (Ogletree and McHenry 1989).

The results suggest that additional follow-up research is needed regarding the involvement of teachers in shared decision making. This study might have resulted in different findings if the researcher had more control on method of data collection and the population had been significantly larger. Additional research is also needed as it relates to teacher decision making and student achievement. Since teachers are closer to students, their decisions can greatly effect the success of site-based management and student achievement.

The Illinois State Legislature and the Chicago Public School system must consider that site-based management takes time and additional resources are needed so that all in the decision making process are well trained on budget and local and state regulations. Finally, as we prepare our students for the twenty-first century, teachers participation can greatly improve school effectiveness, improved student learning, increased staff commitment, and ensured responsiveness to student needs (Liontos 1994).

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